

MUSIC REVIEW

A new space, new season for new pieces

By MARK SWED
Times Staff Writer

Twenty-two Novembers ago, the Los Angeles Philharmonic started its then revolutionary, now widely imitated New Music Group. The idea was simple: Members of the orchestra would volunteer to participate in programs of current music. The concerts were first held, charmingly, in the Mark Taper Forum on whatever set happened to be up.

No one knew how well the notion of traditional symphonic musicians keeping musically up-to-date would catch on. It caught on. Musicians and concertgoers lined up to be included.

Outgrowing the Taper, the ensemble moved to the Japan America Theatre, where one attraction was the late-night neighborhood sushi bars and inexpensive noodle joints for audiences to hang out in after the concerts. For no reason whatsoever, the four or five Monday evening concerts a year were called the Green Umbrella series. When the Colburn School opened its excellent 400-seat Zipper Hall, the series relocated there and even sold out a couple of times, although everyone missed Little Tokyo and the cheap parking.

Now Green Umbrella has come under a larger silver umbrella, the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Monday night, Disney was nearly full and, despite an unusually austere and modest program, Green Umbrella began its 23rd season with an audience roughly six times its normal size. It featured six of the orchestra's principal players, each performing a solo work, no piece lasting more than 11 minutes and no piece older than the New Music Group itself. Two were world premieres commissioned for the program.

This concert was, as is everything for a while, a test of Disney's acoustics and versatility. Each musician stood or sat at the position on stage where he or she normally does when the full orchestra plays. With violin, cello, bass, clarinet, bassoon and piano, there was a wide, if not comprehensive, range of color.

Three of the solo scores have proven staying power. Steve Reich's "New York Counterpoint" features amplified solo clarinet playing against 10 prerecorded clarinet and bass clarinet parts. The pulsing instruments at the opening were a new sound in music in 1985, and the jazzy give-and-take among this many clarinets has retained its freshness. Lorin Levee is an excitable musician, and he played this exciting music with flair. A miked player was not, however, a good test subject for Disney, which isn't out of hot water yet with its muddy amplification system.

While "New York Counterpoint" obsessively multiplies clarinet sounds, Thomas Adès' "Darknesse Visible" for piano and Esa-Pekka Salonen's "Laughing Unlearn't" for violin are essays in subtraction. In his 1992 score, Adès removed notes from an early 17th century John Dowland lute song, creating mysterious trilling textures out of what was left. Joanne Pearce Martin played forthrightly Monday, her percussive tone clear and ringing in Disney's engagingly transparent acoustic.

"Laughing Unlearn't" is a fancifully virtuosic set of variations on a chord progression. Thinking about regaining laughter after Sept. 11, Salonen found inspiration in a line from Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire," and Cho-Liang Lin gave the work a cheerful and spectacular premiere in La Jolla last year. Philharmonic concertmaster Martin Chalifour's beautiful and deeply moving playing was more muted, the laughing still somewhat unlearn't.

The two new pieces were for instruments with low ranges — bassoon and bass. Colin Matthews' "Bassoonova" has small melodic and rhythmic ideas that lurch forward with amusing insistence. Lee Hyla's "Detour Ahead" is just the opposite. Lovely, engaging, sometimes jazz-tinged gestures are rich and sumptuous but too quickly run out of developmental steam. Bassoonist David Breidenthal and bassist Dennis Trembly have colorful personalities and now the acoustic environment in which they can be appreciated.

Peter Stumpf played the U.S. premiere of Dutch composer Van Der Aa's "Oog" (Eye) for cello and prerecorded electronic sounds. Though a conventional study in new music aggression, it perked up the ear as the program's opening work.

Afterward, looking for some place to hang, part of the regular new music crowd hit the tiny bar at the exclusive new Patina restaurant downstairs. The bartenders did not seem pleased.



Photographs by LORI SHEPLER Los Angeles Times

NO FANFARE: Beck was among 11 performers who quietly took the stage at the Henry Fonda Theatre to pay tribute to the late singer-songwriter Elliott Smith.

TRIBUTE

For Elliott Smith, in his own words

A salute to the late performer includes his presence on a movie screen, and a journey by performers through his compelling songbook.

By RICHARD CROMELIN
Times Staff Writer

There's nothing like showing up at your own funeral to make it a real occasion, and that's what Elliott Smith did, after a fashion, at the Henry Fonda Theatre on Monday.

The late singer-songwriter materialized on a large movie screen at the end of an emotion-drenched, three-hour-plus tribute concert, singing his songs and skulking around assorted cities in a surreal documentary called "Strange Parallel" that was made a few years ago.

The celluloid Smith — sweet, sad, playful, fragile, elusive — was every bit as complex and compelling as the music preceding the movie insisted its creator would be — something more than the stereotypic bummed-out bard whose death by his own hand last month at age 34 seemed preordained, or at least predictable.

His vivid presence was a cathartic conclusion that cut both ways, offering some solace while cruelly underscoring the irreversibility of his death. As Beth Orton sang in the last song, "... Never can change that."

Smith wormed his way out of the Pacific Northwest indie-rock scene in the mid-'90s to become one of the most acclaimed singer-songwriters of his generation, but despite a major-label record contract and an Oscar nomination for "Miss Misery" from "Good Will Hunting," he remained a below-the-radar cult figure.

He'd been an L.A. resident for just a few years, but Monday's performers indicated that he'd done quite a job of touching them personally in that time. His songs may be troubled and melancholy, but he obviously was not a bad guy to hang out with.

The sold-out concert, whose proceeds benefit the Elliott Smith Memorial Fund, was presented in a spirit true to Smith's modest manner, with each of the



SEEKING SOLACE: To keep the evening from becoming too sad, Beth Orton strayed from Smith's oeuvre.

11 performers quietly taking the stage and singing a few songs, with the biggest star (Beck) getting no more time nor fanfare than scrappy local bands.

Of course, along with everything else, Smith *was* the ultimate bummed-out bard, and even under the best of circumstances a dose of Smith songs this massive could prove daunting. So the decision by Orton and some other performers to stray from the Elliott oeuvre helped keep the long evening from tipping too far into the dark.

Smith's folk-based style didn't allow for a lot of dynamic variety, so Future Pigeon's dub reggae version of "Waltz #2" was a welcome variation. L.A. veteran Tito Larriva was too broken up to even get through his two songs, and other singers fre-

quently had to pause to collect themselves.

All this was done in the service of achingly beautiful, intricate and intimate pieces of music, sometimes lashing out of a deep pain in cruelly striking images, sometimes diagramming the dynamics of dysfunction with a rigorous eye and a poet's heart.

These songs might seem too intensely personal to be easily interpreted by others, but if Monday's concert established anything beyond Smith's artistry and personal impact on those who knew him, it's that singers looking for a challenge are likely to start turning to his songs the way their elders were drawn to those of Leonard Cohen. And if the results don't reach those standards, it won't be the fault of the songwriter.

QUICK TAKES

'Skin' goes the way of all flesh

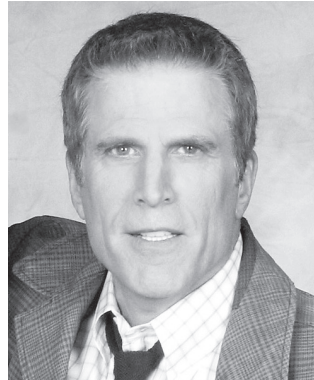
Fox has canceled "Skin," its highly publicized drama produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, after only three episodes.

The series, a Romeo-and-Juliet-style romance set against the backdrop of politics and pornography, premiered to low ratings despite heavy promotion during the baseball playoffs and World Series.

Back-to-back episodes of "The Next Joe Millionaire" will replace "Skin" on Mondays, and previously aired episodes of "The O.C." will air Thursdays at 9 p.m., where "Skin" repeats had been scheduled.

Meanwhile, CBS has pulled the plug on its 5-year-old comedy, "Becker," which starred Ted Danson. The series, nearly canceled last spring, will air into December.

— GREG BRAXTON



CBS

HE'S OUT: Ted Danson's "Becker" will close.

Stars return to 'The Producers'

Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick, the original stars of "The Producers," will return to the Broadway production of the Tony-winning musical on Dec. 30 for 112 performances through April 4, including a gala New Year's Eve performance and party.

The tab for both the performance and the party on Dec. 31 will be \$1,500, although separate tickets to just the show on that night will sell for \$150 to \$600. Tickets for the Lane and Broderick performances will go on sale Nov. 16 at 9 a.m.

— DON SHIRLEY

Flutist loses to the Beastie Boys

The Beastie Boys can't be sued by a jazz flutist for using a six-second sample of his music in their song "Pass the Mic," a U.S. appeals court ruled.

The rap group obtained a license to use the recording of James Newton's "Choir" and repeated an excerpt from the nearly five-minute recording more than 40 times in their song. Newton, a Cal State L.A. professor and conductor of the Luckman Jazz Orchestra, argued that the license didn't give them unlimited rights to the composition and filed a copyright infringement suit.

The U.S. 9th Circuit Court

of Appeals in San Francisco said that the three-note sequence used in "Pass the Mic" is too brief for the average audience to recognize.

From Bloomberg News

Show to honor year's funniest

ABC recently scrapped plans for an awards show honoring "reality" programs, but Comedy Central is riding to the rescue for anyone who was fearful of going into awards-show withdrawal. The cable channel will introduce the Commies on Dec. 7, saluting the funny folks in movies and TV.

The top award is for funniest person of the year. The nominees: Jim Carrey, Adam Sandler, Jon Stewart and Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, the minister of information in the regime of deposed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, the official who boasted of his government's military might even as American troops were taking Saddam International Airport.

From a Times staff writer

USC composer wins Ives award

Composer Stephen Hartke, a professor of composition at the USC Thornton School of Music, has been selected by the American Academy of Arts and Letters to receive the Charles Ives Living Award.

The idea behind the prize, which awards an income of \$75,000 per year for three years, is to give a promising American composer freedom to concentrate on composition; the recipient agrees to forgo salaried employment during those three years. The prize carries no restrictions on accepting commissions.

"There's no more precious gift to an artist than time to concentrate exclusively on work," said Hartke, 51.

Hartke's piece "King of the Sun" will be performed Saturday as part of the Creation Festival at the Walt Disney Concert Hall. His Symphony No. 3 received its world premiere in New York in September.

— LOUISE ROUG

Slick Rick ruling overturned

Rapper Slick Rick, imprisoned in Florida for 17 months as the Immigration and Naturalization Service sought to deport him to his native England, apparently will be released soon, his representatives say.

A ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Kimba M. Wood overturned the deportation decision regarding the singer, whose real name is Ricky Walters, and reinstated a 1995 waiver of the law that requires aliens who commit felonies in America to be sent home. Walters, 38, had been convicted of attempted murder in 1991 but after a prison term resettled in the Bronx, bought two apartment buildings and resumed his singing career.

From staff and wire reports

By the Numbers

TV rankings

Here are the 10 most-watched prime-time programs in the L.A. market last week, based on the average number of households. The national rankings can be found on Page E15.

	PROGRAM	NAT'L RANK	STATION	HOUSEHOLDS
1	Friends	4	KNBC	931,000
2	CSI	1	KCBS	901,000
3	The Simpsons	8	KTTV	700,000
4	Will & Grace	10	KNBC	631,000
5	Monday Night Football	12	KAEC	629,000
6	Without a Trace	13	KCBS	617,000
7	CBS at 75	6	KCBS	609,000
8	The Simpsons (8:30 p.m.)	15	KTTV	589,000
9	Law & Order	9	KNBC	568,000
10	ER	3	KNBC	568,000

Sources: CBS; Nielsen Media Research